

The Klondike Gold Rush International Historic Park will feature a system of markers to point out the natural and human history of the White Pass and Chilkoot Trails.

What set the rush of 1898 apart from its sister rushes in California and Alaska was not the existence of the gold itself, but rather the drama involved in getting to it. The Klondike Trail, one of the most rugged in the world, told the difference between success or failure.

The Chilkoot Pass, despite its formidable appearance, proved to be the main gateway to the Klondike. For many years a bastion against the white man's entry into Alaska, the pass was finally opened in 1881. From that date a small trickle of prospectors began to seek through the pass, until in the classic and final year of 1898, the trail became a torrent.

The trail began at Dyea, Alaska. A half-mile out of Dyea the trail crossed a toll bridge, widened into a wagon road for five or six miles



As an individual marks the events of a lifetime, so a country measures its steps to nationhood by commemorating its history.

The job of recommending the persons, places and events significant to our national history belongs to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. The members are represented on the Board. Many of the members are historians or archivists of distinction. Their collective academic achievements occupy over 200 lines in Canada's Who's Who.

The 14-man Board is appointed by Governor-in-Council as an advisory body to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, whose responsibility is to designate national historic parks and sites. The Board's recommendations may result in the Department inscribing a plaque, purchasing and restoring a historic building, establishing a major national historic park, or co-operating with provincial and municipal governments or historical societies in the restoration of architecture or historical artifacts and documents. Examples of the latter are the Mellou House in Quebec City, Craigflower Manor in Victoria, and the Matheson House in Perth.

Since its first meeting in Ottawa 50 years ago, the Board's recommendations have resulted in the marking of over 600 historic sites across the country and in establishing more than 50 parks.

The Board's recommendations to the Minister are considered by the National Historic Sites Service. The Service was created in 1955 and employs a specialized staff that includes historians, archaeologists and curators to develop, interpret, manage and maintain historic parks and sites.

The pattern of restoration of national historic parks shows a greater number of parks in the East than in the West and reflects too that the Board's recommendations to the Minister are not always followed. To achieve a better thematic and geographic balance, several new parks are being planned in western Canada - the Riel House at St. Vital, Man.; the Motherwell Homestead and Fort Walsh, Sask.; Nootka and Fort St. James, B.C.; and the Klondike Gold Rush International Historic Park, extending from Bennett, B.C., to Whitehorse and Dawson City, Y.T., and including Dyea and Skagway, Alaska; and the celebrated Chilkoot Trail leading from Dyea to Bennett.

ton and the other from Fort Wrangell on the Slikine River were both more difficult and much slower than the Chilkoot or White Pass routes. The fifth, from the port of St. Michael in Alaska via the Yukon River to Dawson, was the least demanding in a physical sense, but was time consuming at a time when speed in reaching the gold fields would make the difference between success or failure.

The Chilkoot Pass, despite its formidable appearance, proved to be the main gateway to the Klondike. For many years a bastion against the white man's entry into Alaska, the pass was finally opened in 1881. From that date a small trickle of prospectors began to seek through the pass, until in the classic and final year of 1898, the trail became a torrent.

The trail began at Dyea, Alaska. A half-mile out of Dyea the trail crossed a toll bridge, widened into a wagon road for five or six miles

and became much rougher as it passed through Finigan's Point, Canyon City, Pleasant Camp and Sheep Camp. Sheep Camp was at the edge of the timber line, the last place for stampeder to secure iron or firewood. As a "lucky chance" stampeder became separated from the main column in relays of five miles, cached it, and repeated the process about 30 times until the entire load had been moved. It has been said that the average stampeder took 90 days to pack his goods over the passes to the head of navigation at Lake Bennett; and that by the time this task was completed a man could have walked 1,500 miles.

The White Pass route from Skagway was about 45 miles long through Log Cabin to the head of Lake Bennett. Six hundred feet lower than the Chilkoot, it was suitable for the use of pack animals and wagons. A wagon road led out of Skagway for several miles until it disappeared on terrain knotted with precipitous hills jutting out from swampy base land. Then it passed through Dyea and Porcupine Hill until it finally reached the summit. From there, it descended an obstacle course to Lake Bennett. Yet 5,000 men chose the White Pass as the most feasible way to the gold fields.

In one respect the Skagway route became an extension of Skagway itself - a stage upon which the rough and brutal life of the coastal city was played out. In the days before an even stagecoach, Royal Mail Service, capturing the essence of the Yukon, wrote that on the White Pass "there is no mercy, no humanity, no fellowship. All is blasphemy, fury and ruthlessness determination."

The one factor favouring the White Pass over the Chilkoot - that pack animals could be used - became its nemesis. By the late autumn of 1897 the trail was known as "Dead Horse Trail" because of the 3,000 horses perished on it. Mercilessly overpacked, a horse on the Skagway Trail was expected to live for six weeks at best. In an environment where men cared little for themselves, it was not surprising they cared nothing for their pack animals.

By late 1897 the White Pass route had become so impassable it was closed and George Bragg, a local entrepreneur, began to clear the mounainside and over the summit. This improvement was followed by construction of

Further, in the autumn of 1897, the Northwest Mounted Police ordered each stampeder to pack a year's load and supplies, the equivalent of one ton, before being allowed entry to Canada territory. Carrying about 50 pounds on his back, a stampeder would move his load in relays of five miles, cache it, and repeat the process about 30 times until the entire load had been moved. It has been said that the average stampeder took 90 days to pack his goods over the passes to the head of navigation at Lake Bennett; and that by the time this task was completed a man could have walked 1,500 miles.

To many, the story of the Chilkoot and White Passes is a witness to an inhuman and perhaps inane side of man's character. To all those who came over them, it was an experience they were never to forget.

3

July, 1970

CANADA
- N13

National Historic Parks News

Klondike Gold Rush International Historic Park

3 1761 11765767 6



The Chilkoot Pass, "the worst trail this side of hell" . . . was in fact the best route to the gold fields. (See The Trails of '98)



Members of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada at their 50th anniversary meeting, October 1968.

Front row, from left: James J. Talmam (Ont.); Allan R. Ross (B.C.); Dr. J. W. C. S. MacLennan (N.B.); Dr. Terence (Ott.); W. E. Taylor (National Museums of Canada); Dr. J. W. C. S. MacLennan (N.B.); Bill Shows; Wilfred J. Smith (Acting Dominion Archivist); Donald G. Creighton (Ont.).

Dawson City is a town of about 500 citizens. Only crumbling buildings remain of the once thriving saloons, theatres and shops of 70 years ago. The most productive mines, some 30 miles away, now yield only asbestos, yet each year thousands of visitors still come from the "outside" to trace the steps of the gold rushers of '98.

Because of the unique history of the Yukon, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has undertaken a long-range restoration program of nearly \$2 million. The project, a co-ordinated program, Bonanza Creek, Bennett and Bennett sites, which will form part of an international historic park being planned with the United States. This is the first integrated park program by Canada and the United States, and the project will involve development and preservation of both historic and natural resources.

One park feature will be the development by both countries of a portion of the historic Chilkoot and White Pass Trails. It was along the tortuous trails leading from the Alaskan panhandle cities of Skagway and Dyea to Bennett, British Columbia, that the treasure hunters swarmed between 1897 and 1900.

On the shores of Lake Bennett they built log scows and canvas boats to bathe the rapids and take them down the snaking channels of the Yukon to the Pacific. On the spring of 1898, when the lake ice broke, thousands of makeshift craft cast off for Dawson.



now or soon to be under the national historic parks system include Robert Service's log cabin, a blacksmith shop, the Yukon Commissioner's furnished residence, the Northwest Mounted Police quartered quarters, a hotel, a newspaper, a general store and a residence typical of the early 1900's.

Another 100 years of some 75 years of Yukon gold mining history to be established in the Bonanza Creek area of the park will include an enormous dredge six storeys high, the famous Bear Creek "Gold Room", and a miner's sod-roofed log cabin. The dredge, a gift from the Yukon Consolidated Gold Corporation Limited to the Historic Sites Service, is located about a half-mile from Discovery Claim, 12 miles upstream of Carcross. "When it is all it was known, was built between 1906 and 1909 by the Yukon Gold Company on Bonanza Creek and operated until 1958.

In the "Gold Room" dredged ore was washed, weighed, processed and melted into bars. The one-storey building will be moved 12 miles from Bear Creek to Discovery Claim and restored with its original equipment.

Also included in the Canadian National Historic Sites Service will also build and furnish a miner's log cabin typical of the era of '38 when thousands panned the gold-rich gravel of the Klondike Valley. By 1905 the gold-bearing creeks were exhausted and improved mechanical methods, organization, and capital were needed for further development. The dredge, an innovation of large-scale mining enterprise, was to keep the gold mining industry operating for another 50 years.



1 In the Klondike Valley the sluice method of gold mining replaced panning used by earliest prospectors and miners. A sluice box was built over a stream bed. Paydirt was shoveled into the sluice box and a swift current of water diverted over it. Gravel was washed away and the gold was left. The rock was caught by parallel cleats at the trough's bottom.

2 The log cabin once inhabited by Robert Service, English-born Klondike poet, is typical of the log shacks miners built in the Klondike. Service, who had wandered into the Yukon after the rush had ended, and in 1906, at the age of 31, began work as a Whitehorse bush pilot. He later moved to Dawson City, where he listened to the yarns of old-timers and wrote them in verse.

3 Some of the first stores on First Street, Dawson, which in 1898 had a population of 30,000. In the autumn of '98, two small buckets of vegetables grown in a Dawson patch brought \$53.75 in the marketplace.



Piecing History Together

On washday 72 bags of grimy bits of pottery, brick and glass are emptied into National Historic Sites Service washing machines for a four-minute rinse. The "unwashables" - lead pipes, iron hardware, metal fittings and ship's fittings thick with rust and mineral scales - are dry-cleaned with a pressurized spray of aluminum oxide or, for less heavily corroded articles, a fine shower of silicone beads.

The Ottawa artifacts laboratory of N.H.S.S. is central repository for objects unearthed at historic sites, containing apparatus for cleaning and preserving artifacts, including a range of front-loading pipes to 200-year-old boot leather. Archaeologist Ian Walker, head of artifact research, directs a staff of 15 artifact analysts and 10 technicians in the painstaking tasks of sorting, cleaning, numbering, cataloguing, mending and analyzing a bewildering range of fragments.

Pieces of ceramic, for example, are sorted into categories - such as porcelain or coarse earthenware - according to glaze, colour, and shape. Acanian ceramic types are currently being studied in the laboratory. Only after restoring perhaps 50 pots with similar characteristics can it be described as a "type" and findings published.

When mended into recognizable form, the objects are passed to the artifact analysts. Peter Priest, an archaeologist specializing in the study of building hardware, points to the significance of artifacts in reconstructing our knowledge of history.

"There are very few references to these mundane things. Nobody bothered to write about them. Besides, antique books of reference are expensive to obtain. And, in general, past studies have overlooked mass-produced articles shipped in quantities to the colonies for studies of the more spectacular prestige wares," he said.

Poising to a massive set of hinged bolts, Priest explained they were once attached to the gate of 18th-century Fort Beauséjour. The excavated site near Sackville, New Brunswick, yielded only rotted wood remains of the gate, but from the position of the buried hardware archaeologists determined how the gate functioned.

The social and physical environment can be glossed over in historical accounts and

journals, but on the basis of what is found on the site you learn who was making what and who was selling to whom," Priest said. This was strikingly illustrated at the site of the 18th-century French fort of Louisbourg in Nova Scotia, where artifacts showed that the French were carrying on considerable trade with their New England adversaries. Such knowledge is cumulative as analysts compare artifacts of known origin with unknown from another site.

Archaeologists feel there is generally an appealing tendency to think everything must be of historical significance. To guide archaeologists and analysts in reconstructing the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Park, many thousands of 18th-century records including building plans, bills, inventory lists and journals, were collected from archives in France, England, the United States and Canada. But, as Walker points out, historical documents can't always be trusted. Neither, it seems, can some artifacts. To guide archaeologists and analysts in reconstructing the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Park, many thousands of 18th-century records including building plans, bills, inventory lists and journals, were collected from archives in France, England, the United States and Canada. But, as Walker points out, historical documents can't always be trusted. Neither, it seems, can some artifacts.

1



ogists found the separate remains of debris left by English and French occupants of the fort, and pieced together the differences between an Englishman's and Frenchman's menu. In 18th-century Nova Scotia, across the seas a variety of foodstuffs was imported by its garrisons. The colonial French had poor contact with their mother country. This is borne out by finding that French colonists had to depend on hunting more than their English counterparts who were relatively well supplied from home.

"In general, the field of excavating recent North American sites - those dating from the time of Columbus - is quite new, not more than 10 years old. People have always been interested in finding exotic objects it's not but not in excavating sites to see how the average man lived. That is why we still know so little," Walker said.

Published quarterly by the National and Historic Parks Branch under the authority of the Minister of Canadian Parks, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development
Editorial and Artistic
Conservation Group,
Office of the Public Information Advisor
400 Laurier W., Ottawa 4
Design: Gottschalk-Ash Ltd.